

# Obama Keeping Manufacturing Focus In Virginia

Ken Thomas, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Praising manufacturing jobs, President Barack Obama was outlining ways of pairing factory output with university research in a bid to bring jobs back to the U.S. and help companies innovate.

Obama was traveling Friday to a manufacturing plant run by aircraft engine maker Rolls-Royce in Prince George, Va., outlining a new proposal to create a series of regional institutes to help manufacturers spur new products and jobs.

The president was making his pitch hours after the government issued its February jobs report, the latest barometer of the economy. The report showed employers created 227,000 jobs last month, though the unemployment rate was unchanged at 8.3 percent.

Obama has highlighted the U.S. economy's addition of 429,000 manufacturing jobs during the past two years, touring factories in Wisconsin, Washington state and North Carolina in recent weeks. Political calculations are not far from the surface in these trips — Virginia is expected to be a major election battleground later this year, and the president was ending the day with fundraisers in Houston to stock up on campaign cash.

Obama has pointed to a decline in unemployment and improved fortunes in the manufacturing sector as a sign the economy is improving. Republicans hoping to challenge Obama have accused the president of failing to steer the economy out of the recession and placing obstacles like debt and burdensome regulations in the way of growth.

In Virginia, Obama was spelling out a \$1 billion plan to create a network of up to 15 regional institutes to create partnerships among private industry, universities and community colleges and government to foster innovation. The president was also announcing a \$45 million pilot program that would show the type of potential collaboration among academia and industry.

The Rolls-Royce site is part of a project to bring together researchers from Virginia universities and global manufacturing companies, an example of what Obama hopes to accomplish. The president has promoted a number of initiatives aimed at manufacturers and the return of jobs to the U.S., including the elimination of tax incentives that make it more attractive for companies to ship jobs overseas.

In Texas, Obama was raising campaign cash among supporters who live in a reliably Republican state. Jimmy Carter, in 1976, was the last Democratic presidential candidate to carry Texas, but changing demographics and an influx in Hispanic voters have given Democrats hopes of competing in the state beyond the 2012 elections.

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Obama's fundraisers included a reception with more than 600 people at Union Station at Minute Maid Park, home of the Houston Astros, with tickets starting at \$500 per person.

The president was also attending a dinner with 70 people at the home of Tony Chase, the CEO of recruiting and staffing firm ChaseSource and a law professor at the University of Houston, and Dina Alsowayel, the associate director of women's studies at the University of Houston. Tickets cost \$35,800 per person.

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